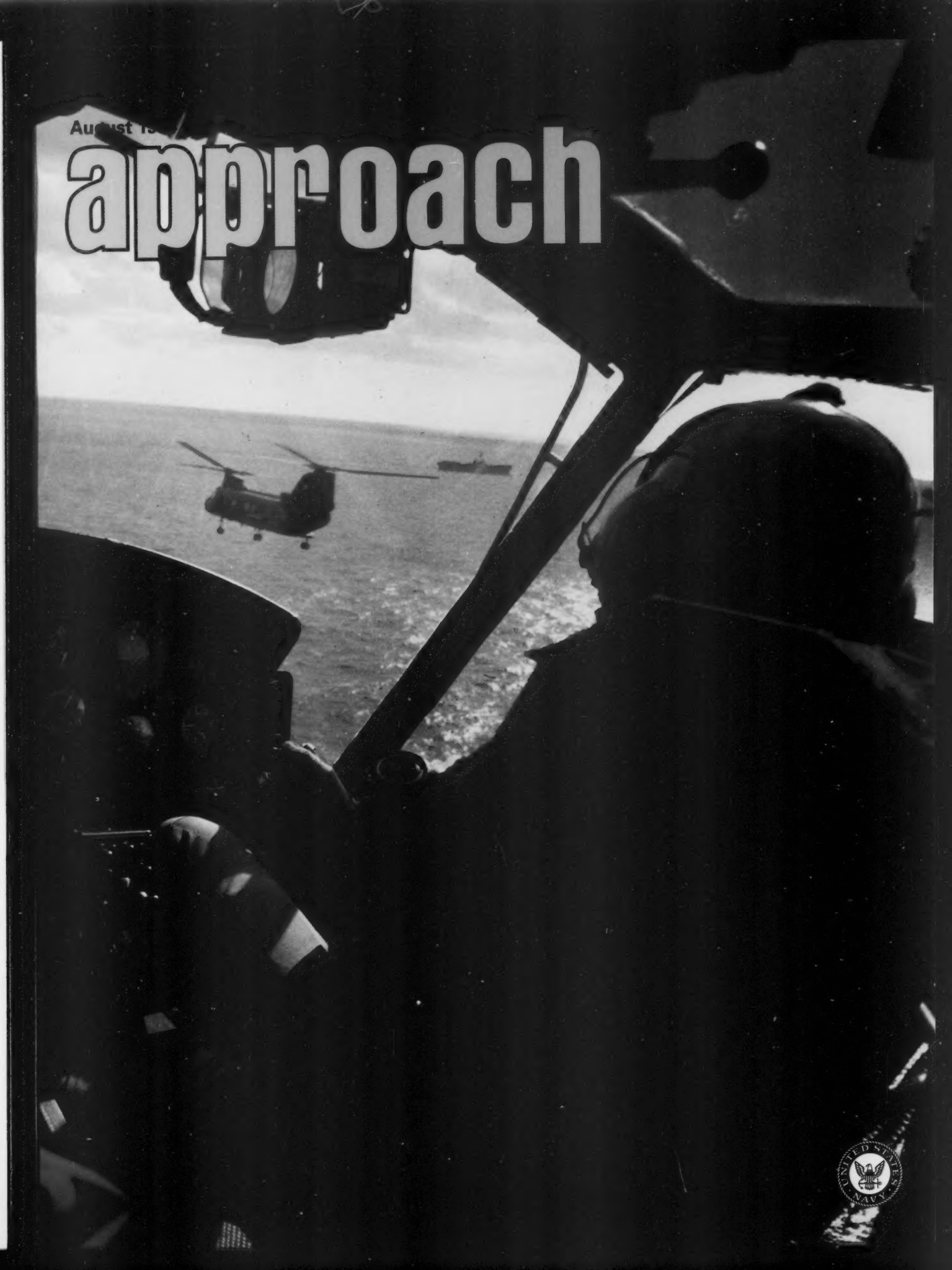
August 1

approach



The Mishap Rate is Down and No One is Responsible

The aviation mishap rate — that little figure that tells us our chances of surviving a 20-year career — has dropped to 1.54 for the year to date. It's been dropping ever since 1955, and we've heard all the reasons: the introduction of NATOPS, the formation of the RAGs and FRSs, and that wonderful angled carrier deck. For the past 10-15 years the mishap rate has decreased, albeit more slowly, because of safety stand-downs, RA/RM, aircraft design, and better education.

These were not major breakthroughs; they just helped focus aviators' attention on the dangers of their profession. Of course, I feel that the fear of ending up as an *Approach* feature kept some people from continuing to fly when they shouldn't.

Our statisticians tell me that the mishap rate is now below the lower control limit based on previous mishap rates. This means that the rate is lower than what we could expect from normal deviations around the mean rate. (Statisticians sit around and dream about numbers falling outside the normal range. It's like aviators dreaming about flying just above a solid white undercast. It gives them that same dreamy feeling.)

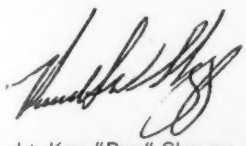
The number crunchers tell me the lower number means something has changed but they can't identify the cause. Well, as tactical aviators say, "The first guy to the white board wins the fight." Therefore, I offer the following three reasons:

1 Because of budget cutbacks, flight time is harder to get. Pilots are flying more fundamental training-type sorties instead of aggressive, envelope-expanding tactical sorties. Any evidence of this experience with reduced flight time is anecdotal instead of empirical. However, I noticed I averaged 18 hours per month in my first full set of workups and cruise. That's nowhere near the 25 hours per month I've always heard considered optimal for tactical pilots, and this was during the most intense phase of the turnaround cycle.

2 Reduced OPTAR and a diminished threat have drastically changed our operation requirements and procedures.

3 Aviators are worried about their career. With the drawdown in full swing, guys can't risk even one blemish on their record. Maybe they could recover from such a spot in their folders in the past, but not now. Commanding officers probably feel the same way. They're not willing to risk their career because one of their JOs crashed a plane. Not that they ever accepted the loss of an airplane, but they're becoming even more conservative.

Am I completely wrong in these assumptions? Could be, but I think aviators aren't being pushed as hard. I also think they're more conservative because they recognize they aren't as proficient on a daily basis, and because they realize that being aggressive could cost more career-wise than it did in the past.



Lt. Ken "Boz" Skaggs

inside approach

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On the cover: CH-46 and UH-1N from HMM-365 with USS *Iwo Jima* (Photo by Rick Mullen)

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A Pilot's Got to Kn

By Lt. G

Night bombing hop off the ship somewhere in the Puerto Rico Op Area? No problem, I did some night bombing in the FRS. Live ordnance? Well, I did drop live bombs in the FRS once, six months ago. Besides, I'm a qualified strike-fighter pilot. Live bombs are my job. New target? I've studied the photos, and even found the target, once, in the daylight.

On the surface, it sounds manageable, but put all of these together with a nugget pilot on his second night sortie from the carrier, and you may have all the ingredients for a disaster.

I launched, climbed overhead and waited for my lead. I soon realized that lead wasn't going to make the launch, so I called on the back radio for guidance. He told me to press with the mission if I felt up to it. Was he kidding? I was a trained killing machine (or so I thought). I was well-prepared and fully equipped to execute the mission; at least I felt confident. Here was a perfect opportunity to prove my abilities to my new squadron. Of course I would continue as a single.

There were numerous altitude and airspace restrictions on the route to the target, so I concentrated on them to ensure there were no flight violations. After all, I was in the fleet now and expected to know my stuff. I soon noticed that my LST pod, which was my primary means of target designation, wasn't working. Bells should have been going off in my head, but my preoccupation with course rules stifled any alarms.

I navigated to the target, checked in with the FAC, copied my nine-line brief, and waited for another section to clear the target before starting my run. That's where the trouble began.

ow His Limitations

Cdr. John Leenhouts

ffman

With no LST, no FLIR and no lead, I decided to rely on my INS to designate the target. Unfortunately, with a SINS alignment and no updates, my system was not accurate enough for CAS. I called, "In," and rolled onto what I thought was the target area. It looked like the photos, but I couldn't distinguish surface features on the ground.

I promptly pickled my five 500-pound bombs and pulled off. Range control immediately told me that my hits were off the range and that the target was closed while they investigated. I returned overhead, tanked, and checked in with Marshal. I felt about an inch tall, a far cry from the bold warrior who launched two hours earlier. I trapped and returned as the goat to accept my due punishment. While my pride sustained a large blow, fortunately that was the only casualty. No one on the ground was injured. The bombs landed in an uninhabited forest area on government property. This incident graphically illustrates the hazards of overstepping the bounds of one's abilities. The errors began in the brief with my attitude and preparedness. It never occurred to me that my lead would not launch. I planned to join up, shut up and follow my lead. I figured that I could just bomb off of his hits. I never thought of the possibility of being a single.

To compound things, I got so wrapped up in procedures that I didn't consider the tactical portion of the flight. I didn't recognize my limitations, and I let the situation dictate my actions. On every flight, the aircrew must be prepared for the "what ifs" that are a part of naval aviation. Now I plan for such contingencies and recognize when a situation is beyond my experience or ability.

Lt. Huffman flies with VFA-83

My copilot voiced concern for a mountainous island ahead. He wanted to change course to the right to avoid it... but I was sure of where I was.

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD 1790

A White Wall of Disorientation

By LCdr. Kim N. Rose, USCG

The SAR call was for an overdue boatload of hunters from a small, isolated Alaskan village. Snow flurries swirled on a quickening breeze as we manned our HH-3F. The approaching winter storm heightened our concern for the hunters' safety.

I'd recently completed my syllabus to become an aircraft commander. Regardless of experience, new arrivals were restricted to copilot during familiarization flights, which included training in the use of the weather radar for terrain avoidance at night or in marginal-weather missions.

This night was my first SAR since I received my HAC designation. I had an experienced HAC as my copilot. He had, in fact, given me a fair portion of my familiarization flights.

"Great guy to have along on this one," I thought. I decided to ease into my new role, so I gave him the right seat, letting him do most of the flying while I played the role of good safety pilot.

Filled with the urgency of SAR, we were quickly airborne, level at 300 feet with the after-takeoff checklist complete. I dragged out the local VFR chart to back up our radar picture and get a detailed look at where we were going. I checked our initial course and satisfied, started to wrestle with the chart just as we were enveloped by a white wall of disorientation. The snow storm extinguished the comforting glow of the downtown lights. My copilot voiced concern for a mountainous island ahead. He wanted to change course to the right to avoid it, but I was sure of where I was. The island would be on our left as we continued on course. A quick look at the radar confirmed our position.

"What the heck," I thought, "he's been around here forever and prefers a bigger comfort zone. Besides, this is not a major decision." I agreed as I continued to try getting the chart into a half-Nelson and onto my kneeboard. "Sure, come to the right," I said matter-of-factly.

Just as I made the last fold in the chart, I heard the particular RAWS tone that corresponds with 50 feet or less between the aircraft and the ground. I yelled, yanked collective and tried to spin my scan up from zero. The compass card showed we had turned over 90 degrees to the right, far greater than the course correction I had expected. Our turn had brought a new obstacle to bear, passing us over one of the harbor's outer islands.

After I stopped trying for an HH-3F time-to-climb record, the CGAS radioed that the overdue hunters had returned. I calmed my temporarily confused (and now frightened) veteran copilot, getting him back to the task of flying the helo, while I resumed the role of safety pilot. We had a lot of things to discuss after landing.

Take the extra minute before takeoff to complete important tasks that might interfere with flying the airplane or providing backup. I should have arranged the chart before takeoff. Minimize distractions in the critical phases of flight after takeoff and before landing. In this instance, taking the extra minute on the deck to fold the chart would not have caused delays, considering transit time, and the delay in notifying the Coast Guard.

Be definitive in cockpit communications or directions. "Coming to the right," or, "Turning right a little," does not give enough information to the safety pilot for effective backup in instrument conditions. Defining the limits of a change—such as, "Right to a heading of...," or, "Coming right 30 degrees," supplies a finite parameter for the safety pilot to check pilot performance.

When you're in charge, you're in charge. This is not to diminish the importance of cockpit-resource management and making thorough use of your crew. Respect experience greater than yours; use it, but do not blindly trust its wisdom. Experienced pilots make mistakes, so when you know you are right, and the situation warrants a command decision, make a command decision.

A quick check of the outlying island's elevation on the next morning's training flight revealed that tree tops on the highest elevation reached 300 feet MSL. Close call. ◀

LCdr. Rose is assigned to USCGAS Sacramento.

Disco

By LCdr. Steve Sprag

It was almost a beautiful day in the Indian Ocean. I was a nugget RIO on my first cruise and I was learning a lot. For instance, you have to sound cool even when you're single engine. Also, never put rainbow sprinkles on a chocolate auto-dog. And, the skipper's ready-room chair is reserved 24 hours a day.

My pilot was a great guy. His call sign, "Smooth Jake," summed up his piloting skills and his teaching style. I was one lucky nugget.

On this particular day, Jake and I were scheduled for a "pinky" launch and the typical pitch black, IO milk-bowl recovery.

Our Tomcat had a history of quirky electrical gripes, but our team of electricians couldn't duplicate any of them. Jake and I noted the gripes in the book but had no idea what kind of excitement was in store for us.

As the sunlight dimmed, all I could think was, "Boy, I hate going off cat 1 at night."

I rogered the weight board, we went into tension and, wham! we were on our way. When the cat fired, all the lights inside and outside our fighter went out at the same time. Jake and I were now sitting in the pitch-black cockpit of our "midnight" jet, groping our way through the rapidly darkening Indian Ocean skies.

After a careful climbout, we did some inspired troubleshooting, followed by some healthy G cycles, and managed to regain our cockpit lighting; however, try as we might, we couldn't get any of our external lights to come back to life.

Jake and I discussed our dilemma and the increased possibility of someone running into us, especially with two full events airborne at the same time.

I notified the ship of our predicament and requested permission to land with the recovery that was now in progress. After the requisite pregnant pause, the powers-that-be agreed that we shouldn't be out there in the dark and vectored us to final.

As we flew closer to the ship and recovering aircraft, we began to see other jets in the area. Jake suggested I get out my strobe light and prepare to use it if another airplane tried to simultaneously occupy our little piece of sky.

I located my strobe light and removed it from my vest just as we pushed over. I then promptly dropped the light between my legs and watched in horror as the strobe began firing and the light slid under my ejection seat. The entire cockpit immediately filled with momentary flashes of blinding white light.

"No! No! Not yet! Turn it off!" Jake yelled as he tried to fly the needles inside our cockpit that was beginning to resemble an Olongapo disco. After a few more moments of horror and some muttered excuses, I remembered that the rogue strobe was still tied to my survival vest. I quickly retrieved the offending light and secured it just as we approached one mile.

I tried my best to make a cool sounding ball call as Jake flew his usual smooth pass (this time without benefit of night vision). We taxied out of the wires, were chained and shut down as I began to think up an acceptable excuse for my buffoonery.

It turned out I didn't need an excuse. Jake just looked at me, laughed and urged me to hold my strobe light a little tighter next time. Looking back now, I guess Jake was just happy he didn't ask me to take out my pistol.

LCdr. Spragg flies with VF-201. He was assigned to VF-154 at the time of this story.

Jet

Scared

By Lt. D.S. Anderson

Here's an unusual experience by a former Army paratrooper—before he saw the light and up-graded his professional activity. Jumping out of airplanes on a regular basis requires the same attention to detail we in the Navy and Marine Corps demand to stay in our jets and do our mission. This author had a different perspective to the same general product. He almost didn't live to experience the second.

"Bulletproof" is a term that has long been associated with aviation safety. We gain experience, get comfortable in our aircraft, and then find ourselves not worrying about mishaps. We get so used to cheating death, even on the most routine of flights, that we forget danger is always present. One very cold, very dark night, when I was an 18-year-old Army paratrooper, I learned that the Grim Reaper is always standing by to snatch us from the world of the living.

I was used to dealing with danger. I had qualified with the M-16 rifle, M-60 machine gun, and M-203 grenade launcher. I had successfully negotiated the hand-grenade course without blowing up myself or my buddies. I had completed Airborne school and had more than 20 night jumps. And in all this, I never thought much about death. These things weren't dangerous—they were fun! I was having the time of my life!

In all these adventurous activities, we always took precautions, and our gear was always in tip-top shape. I knew the emergency procedures for all the different parachute malfunctions. No danger, right? Wrong!

The drone that plagued the inside of a C-141 had lulled most of us to sleep. We had been airborne for more than two hours and were scheduled to hit the drop zone in another hour. The jump master, a crusty old first sergeant (E-8) who had completed three tours in 'Nam, strolled down the two aisles, randomly kicking or shoving sleeping soldiers.

"Wake up ladies! Let's get ready to put our knees in the breeze. There's a horde o' commies down there just waiting to die for their country. Anderson! Wake up Jones over there before I break your skinny little arms!"

I was afraid he would do it, too. It was rumored that he had beat up a private once for failing to see that a static line was misrouted on his buddy's parachute.

I woke up Jones and we started the ritual of 'chuting up. It was difficult in the confines of the C-141's fuselage, but we managed. I helped Jones get into his gear and checked him out from top to bottom, front to back. Then he did the same for me.

As usual, we paid extra attention to four critical areas of the parachute and harness.

First, the routing of the static line. It pulls the parachute out of the pack and keeps privates from getting beat up by jumpmasters.

Next, the attaching points on the harness quick-release mechanism.

to Death

The two leg straps and two shoulder straps must be securely joined to this mechanism, located in the center of the chest just above the reserve 'chute.

Third, the release plate, which is on top of the quick release mechanism. It must be rotated to the "locked" position. When the plate is rotated to the "unlocked" position, merely pressing on the release plate causes the shoulder and leg straps to disconnect, and the harness falls neatly off the paratrooper.

Finally, the safety clip. It hangs from a bright yellow lanyard, prevents the release plate from being pressed, even when the plate is in the "unlocked" position.

After Jones and I had checked each other out thoroughly, the jumpmaster inspected every inch of our gear, top to bottom, front to back. A few moments later, the white cabin lights were changed to red, and the troop doors opened, revealing the waiting blackness of the winter night. On command, I stood up, hooked up, and shuffled to the open door. I hurled myself into the 130-knot jet stream.

I counted to myself at the top of my lungs, "One thousand, two thousand, three thousand..."

As a kid, I always wondered what it would be like to be sucked up in a tornado like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz and once again, a second before my parachute opened, I was reminded that now I knew! This wasn't dangerous; it was fun. I couldn't believe they were paying me to do this.

I floated toward the ground and prepared for landing. Landings were the only part about this business that could be dangerous. At worst you could break a leg, and at best you got the wind knocked out of you.

After what was one of my softer landings, I knelt down and reached for the safety clip under the release plate, but it wasn't there. I fumbled in the dark and found it already detached and hanging at the end of its lanyard. No problem. It must have detached during the exit, which was known to happen occasionally. Good thing the release plate has a "locked" position.

Try as I could, though, I could not get the release plate to turn counter-clockwise from the locked position. It simply would not budge. I began to panic. If I didn't get out of this parachute harness and beat feet to the rendezvous point, my squad leader would chew me up and spit me out like a rusted piece of [illegible].

Then, the answer to the stuck release plate dawned on me. An ice-cold terror swept over me as I realized that the release plate would not rotate; it was already in the locked. But it couldn't be. I had checked it. Jones had checked it. The jumpmaster had checked it, hadn't he? And it couldn't have rotated by itself, could it? Of course not.

In the dark, I could not see if the red pointer was indeed pointing to the unlocked position. There was only one way to tell. I gently pressed the release plate.

Click!

The sound stopped my heart. What happened? It scared me to death; all the attaching points released and the harness fell neatly off my body.

The Grim Reaper had swung his bloody sickle and missed, but I was very much [illegible]

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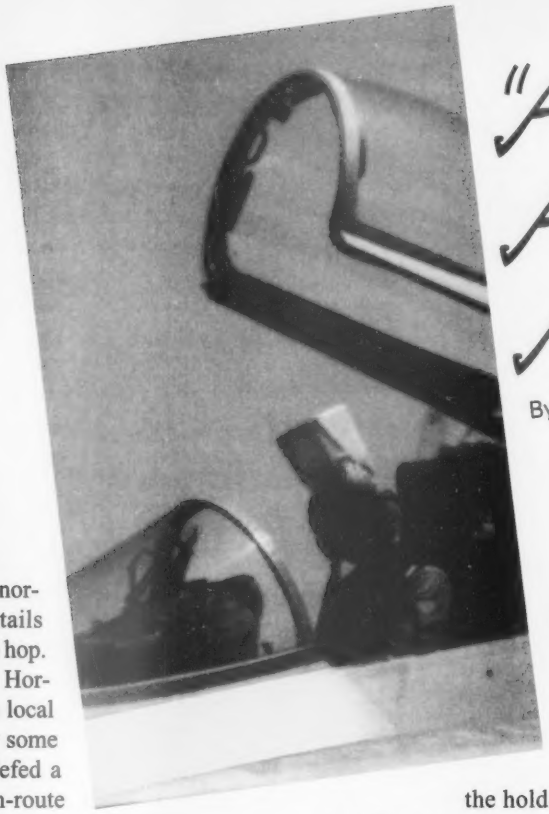


"Abort, Abort, Abort!"

By LCdr. Jeffrey R. Penfield

The brief covered all the normal administrative details plus the tactical portion of the hop. I would lead a flight of four Hornets, callsign Hobo 61, on a local low-level route, followed by some high-altitude bombing. I briefed a two-section takeoff with en-route rendezvous.

A standard briefing item is abort procedures. I covered a single-aircraft abort, as well as the very unlikely section abort. I briefed that if a single aircraft aborted, the other aircraft would continue the takeoff roll. If there was a dual-aircraft abort, each aircraft would maintain its respective half of the runway.

After preflight, man-up and engine start, my division taxied. As we approached the runway, I noticed a Navy C-12, callsign 7S461, holding short at an intersection 2,000 feet upwind from where we would begin our takeoff roll. Everything appeared routine as I requested takeoff clearance on UHF. Tower responded with instructions to position and hold, and we taxied onto the runway. We then got our clearance, and I prepared my section of Hornets for takeoff.

The C-12 crew had been conducting takeoff checks as we approached the runway. Listening for takeoff clearance on VHF, the twin's crew received what they thought was their takeoff clearance and took the duty. As the C-12 taxied to the centerline, its crew noted my division already on the runway and assumed they were cleared to takeoff in front of us.

Meanwhile, my wingman and I completed the checks for engine turn-up and visual checkout, and we began our takeoff roll. After initial brake release, I looked forward and saw the C-12 taxiing for what I thought was the hold-short line. This perception quickly changed as the C-12 continued onto the runway directly in front of our section.

Knowing there was not enough runway to get airborne, the only thing to do was to make a dual-aircraft abort. Simultaneously broadcasting my abort intentions on the second radio and executing abort procedures, it became apparent that we weren't going to be able to stop behind the C-12. Luckily, the C-12 continued to the centerline, allowing enough room on either side for my wingman and I to successfully swerve around him.

As we taxied off the runway, I began to piece together what had happened. A simple breakdown in communication was the main factor. The C-12 was using VHF for radio communication. My flight was using UHF. The tower was using both VHF and UHF. Each flight could hear the tower but not each other.

After simultaneous requests for takeoff from the Hornets and the C-12, Tower issued the clearance to us (Hobo 61) and the C-12 (7S461) unaware of the similar numbers in the callsigns, and mistakenly rogered the call on VHF.

Since each flight could not hear the other's comm, neither realized the conflict. Tower's incoming communications were stepped on by simultaneous broadcasts from the separate flights.

This near-mishap was averted by quick actions, strict compliance to the brief, and a little luck. If we had not seen the C-12 until later, we might not have been able to make our timely abort.

Each pilot's thorough knowledge of his abort procedures was a key factor. Any hesitation in aborting could have complicated the situation. My wingman performed especially well since he saw the C-12 seconds after I did.

Lastly, if the C-12 had not continued to centerline as we aborted, we would have had to choose between collision or leaving the runway. ◀

...The Wingman's Perspective

By Lt. D.L. Ashlock

My perspective was a little different from the lead's. During the section takeoff, I focused on the lead aircraft. I was unaware of any conflict until the lead aircraft actually initiated the abort.

On my lead's signal, we simultaneously selected afterburner and began our takeoff roll on what appeared to be a normal section go. With the aircraft rapidly accelerating through 80 knots, I found myself coming back on the power to maintain position. I heard my lead broadcast,"Abort, abort, abort!" on the No. 2 radio. Since my jet was working OK, I pushed my throttles up to full afterburner and continued the takeoff as briefed.

As I passed my lead and shifted my scan forward, I saw the C-12 for the first time. Now, at more than 90 knots, I realized why my lead aborted. I reduced the throttles to idle, applied full brakes, and hoped the Hornet's anti-skid was as good as everyone said.

After a few seconds of full braking and maintaining my side of the runway, it became apparent that there was no way I was going to be able to get my 40,000-pound jet stopped behind the C-12, which was now just 500 feet in front of me. For a split second, I thought about folding the wings but discounted it just as fast. The only escape route was to veer off to the extreme edge of the runway. The Hornet's anti-skid worked, and I was able to slow down enough to maneuver around the right side of the C-12 with my lead passing down its left side a few seconds later. Neither of us struck the C-12 or left the runway. Any additional time between my lead's abort and my own could have easily been the difference between success and disaster. ◀

LCdr. Penfield and Lt. Ashlock fly with VFA-94.

Our survival is a testament to the effectiveness of the Navy's water survival and emergency procedures training.

My Submarine Seasprite Ride

By Lt. E. Reed

My HAC and I were returning from a flawless torp-drop exercise at the Pacific Missile Test Facilities off Kaui; the range monitor had commended us for one of the best ASW runs he had seen in months.

We had eaten, debriefed, preflighted and were now headed for home. The SH-2F has an auto-blade track system that basically helps to maintain a smooth rotor track. However, as soon as we took off, we began experiencing what is commonly called a one-vibration-per-revolution, or one-per.

The HAC in the left seat decided to manually track the blades in flight, which is a common practice since the auto-tracking system occasionally gets squirrelly.

Unable to get a smooth track like the one we had before leaving the range, we decided to give the auto system another shot. No sooner had we engaged the system than our worst nightmare began. The servo flap on one of the main rotor blades departed its main member, and the aircraft started vibrating violently vertically and laterally. The vibrations were so bad that we were afraid the rotors would fail.

Although we were only 1.5 miles from a paved airfield, the severity of the vibrations forced us to ditch. We autorotated, entering the water with zero ground speed.

As soon as we hit, the seats bottomed out and the front cockpit windows exploded. The helo immediately rolled right; I was underwater, out of breath and inverted before I could realize this was the real thing.

A SEAL chief taught me in "stupid swim" that "panic in the water is an irreversible process." I tried to maintain my composure as best I could with no air in my lungs and strapped to a piece of metal that had me upside down and sinking fast.

Our survival is a testament to the effectiveness of the Navy's water-survival and emergency-procedures training. I don't remember why, but the first thing I did was reach for my HEED bottle in my SV-2. After a couple of breaths, I felt completely at ease. I then quickly disconnected my cords, harness, and evacuated the aircraft.

As I rose to the surface, I was concerned about getting an air embolism, so I let my HEED bottle fall from my mouth, stroking and kicking my way upward for what seemed like an eternity. The subsequent rescue was quick and uneventful.

The HEED bottle saved my life. I might not have been able to exit the aircraft without it. HEED gave me a second chance. ◄

Lt. Reed is assigned to VT-27.

Emergency Descent

By LCdr. Les Panek

I felt that I knew our C-9's ADB by heart, since I had practically lived in the bird for two weeks. The only noticeable gripe was on the pressurization system—intermittent fluctuations and an occasional decrease in cabin pressure, which was fully controllable in manual.

Previous troubleshooting had revealed a faulty pressure-control box and a sticking outflow valve, which were quickly repaired. However, I was a little concerned about the absence of a test set, since we couldn't give the system a complete check. The fact that pressure held, and that we were able to control pressure in manual before and after repairs, was reassurance that we were complying with the MESM and MEL. Before takeoff, I reminded the crew of the pressurization and our apparent success in fixing it.

As forecast, it was a CAVU night as we climbed to our cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. Ninety-five miles from our destination, we began our descent to FL 240, and I could feel the pressure surge slightly in my ears. Instinctively, I looked up at the cabin climb indicator above my head as I placed my hand on the control wheel for the cabin pressure-outflow valve in anticipation of going to manual control. The cabin-pressure indicator initially showed a climb of about 100 fpm, then dipped to a descent of 1,000 fpm. Just as I was about to go to manual control, the pressurization stabilized to a normal rate of 300 fpm.

Descending through FL 320, I directed my crew chief to put his hand on the pressure-control wheel in case we had more than just surges. Something was not quite right with the system, and I wanted all the help I could get should the cabin begin to dump pressure.

Sure enough, the cabin-pressure indicator again cycled through a climb and a descent as my crew chief tried to control it manually. This time, however, the indicator pegged off-scale in a climb despite being in the full forward-manual position on the control wheel.

I reached for my quick-donning mask and saw that my copilot and crew chief were doing likewise. I called out the boldface emergency procedures and directed my crew chief to read the checklist for rapid decompression and emergency descent. The warning light for the cabin-pressure annunciator came on as the cabin altitude climbed past 10,000 feet.

At this point, I wondered if we had an outflow valve stuck open or possibly a hole in the aircraft somewhere. I quickly ruled out the latter as the off-duty crew chief entered the cockpit to tell us that most of the masks had dropped back aft, all the passengers were on oxygen, and that the cabin was in good shape. Several mask panels failed to open automatically, but we quickly pried them open manually. I immediately sent the crew chief aft to get on oxygen himself and to assist the flight attendants.

Meanwhile, my copilot was busy coordinating our emergency and vectors direct to destination with foreign air traffic controllers. This was easier said than done, given the language barrier, coupled with the noise generated by a rapidly depressurizing aircraft in an emergency descent.

I wasn't too concerned with traffic around us as we were already cleared to FL 240 and had declared an emergency. However, I didn't want any delay in getting lower, so I told my copilot to ask for 12,000 feet. We then called destination operations to advise them of our status and to request medical assistance when we arrived.

As we passed FL 200, my copilot began to call out altitudes every thousand feet in response to our brief of the MEA. The mountains appeared particularly ominous in the moonlight.

I thought, "What if we hadn't briefed the MEA and were IMC?"

Several announcements over the public-address system seemed to calm most of the passengers. Several attempts to call the aft-flight attendant station were unsuccessful, because the crew was still tending to passengers. Fortunately, the off-duty crew chief once again proved invaluable. He managed to call us to relay that all was as well as could be expected. My biggest concern at this point was the condition of a woman and young boy who couldn't valsalva.

The only noticeable gripe was on the pressurization system—intermittent fluctuations and an occasional decrease in cabin pressure...

At 10,000 feet, with 50 miles to go, I told the passengers to remove their masks, that all was well with the aircraft, and that medical personnel were standing by at our destination. The field came into view, lit up like a Christmas tree, and we all sighed with relief.

As we rolled into the chocks, medical personnel were ready and quickly examined those passengers still in distress. The remaining passengers went into the terminal. We turned the aircraft over to maintenance and debriefed.

Here are a few of the lessons we came up with.

If we had used a test set in troubleshooting, we would have discovered a corroded cannon plug at the outflow-valve control motor.

You should try wearing the quick-donning mask for at least five minutes (36,000 feet to 10,000 feet with a 6,000 fpm descent rate), and you should try talking through it to Center and Approach, as well as to your cockpit crew, cabin crew and the passengers. If you haven't, you're not ready for an emergency descent. Aircraft commanders, make yourselves, your copilot and crew chief practice as often as feasible. Flight attendants, when was the last time you donned the walk-around oxygen bottle? My loadmaster agreed that putting on the mask occasionally to simulate an emergency would have made him more comfortable in dealing with our situation.

Several passengers initially failed to put on their masks despite hearing the preflight brief and being seasoned C-9B passengers.

To the Navy population at large, if a mask drops in front of you, it's not because we're trying to entertain you. Put it on!

Trying to talk with a passenger who cannot valsalva in a noisy cabin is next to impossible. Passengers simply can't hear you or are in so much pain that they will be unable to focus on what you are saying. My crew communicated with those passengers in distress by using basic hand signals. The crew tried to get the person to valsalva by demonstrating the technique and then pointing to the person to try to get them to attempt it.

We were already cleared to FL 240 and in a sector relatively clear of traffic when we lost cabin pressure, so I was not too concerned with traffic. However, I could just as easily have found myself in the Northeast Corridor making the emergency descent. A straight-ahead descent might not be an option. If you are on a jet route, you will have to turn and get off the route, without generating negative G or an unusual attitude.

Our aircraft was intact, so our limiting speed, Vmo/Mmo, was the max airspeed of the aircraft— 350 KIAS/.84M. Although NATOPS gives the aircraft's structural limitation airspeed (VB) as 285 KIAS/.79M, your actual limit would be that airspeed that would not produce any shaking or vibration. A pilot would also have to carefully consider changing configurations. How many times have you seen your squadronmates hot-wired to extend the speed brakes during a simulation and not even consider the possibility of structural damages? Maybe we do it to ourselves on training flights to be expeditious.

Finally, in all the excitement, we almost forgot our altimeter setting. Let's see, transition level or below 18,000 feet, what is it today? We can overlook something as basic as the altimeter setting when dealing with an emergency. ◀

LCdr. Panek flies with VR-58.

By Lt. James K. Otto

Hornet in

I was a cruise-experienced CAT I on my second set of work-ups, ready to pass on all my wealth of experience to the new guys. But on this day, I was about to become very salty by being scared half out of my wits.

It was to be a day strike from the SOCAL operating area to the target ranges at Yuma. The strike consisted of four A-6s and two F/A-18s dropping Mk-25s, as well as a Tomcat MiG sweep through the target area just prior to TOT.

My crew would proceed just behind the MiG sweep and in front of the strikers to a HARM shoot point just outside the simulated SAM threat envelope. After our shot, we would set up our jam orbit. The strike package would fly the same route four minutes later.

We had briefed using altitude splits to clear ourselves from the incoming strikers. The Intruders were coming at 18K, the Hornets were at 20K, and we were at 21K. It sounded like a great plan, and we were going to execute it like clockwork, but all did not go as briefed.

As we entered the MOA, we saw all players at the rendezvous point. The Tomcats pushed first because of their longer ingress route, followed by our Prowler.

We proceeded to our HARM shot point at 420 knots ground speed, shot our simulated HARM on the button, and set our jam orbit. As we turned outbound for the second time in our orbit, we knew the strikers were going to be coming right below us. First, we saw the A-6s, the lead section followed by the trail section. OK, they're on altitude and clear of us. The Hornets were next.

As the next few seconds went by, I couldn't find the Hornets. Then I heard ECMO 1 shout, "F-18!" He pointed to our one o'clock. At first glance, I saw nothing, so I moved my head to see around that big fat canopy bow and saw an F/A-18 co-altitude, nose on, at less than a quarter-of-a-mile.

I had thought about this situation and what I would do many times on the ground. I rolled the jet inverted and pulled back all the way to buffet to get the nose down. This was my maneuver of choice because it left no room for doubt for the other pilot that I was going nose low.

As our nose passed through 15 degrees down, we saw the Hornet pass above us by a small margin. How small? Well, we could read his bureau number.

When we got back to the ship, we went down to the Hornet ready room to debrief what had just happened. The Hornet pilot had just started his videotape before our close encounter. He saw us as we rolled inverted, and knew he had to pull up to avoid a midair. His 5.5 Gs and

Our Cockpit

my inverted 3 Gs gave us enough separation so that we both walked away from it.

Think about emergencies while you have time, on the ground before you strap on a jet. I'm quite certain that if I had not thought about this situation, I might have pulled up at the same instant the F/A-18 did. If I had used a negative-G pushover, the F/A-18 pilot may have done the same, with the results being a CPA of zero. Aggressively positioning my aircraft nose low and inverted gave us the last ditch margin of safety needed to avoid a collision. ➤

Lt. Otto flies with VAQ-138.

Lost at the Airport... Again!

By Cdr. John W. Winkler

These events happened in 1993, which is surprising because the naval facility where they occurred has been in place for a long time, and all the bugs had been worked out. At least there's a happy ending...this time.

We were on a torpedo-weapons detachment to NAS Whidbey Island. It was the end of the fiscal year, and we had a chance to get quickly up on step by dropping nine exercise torpedoes on the Nanoose instrumented-acoustic range located some 30 miles west of Vancouver, B.C. The fall weather in the Northwest is potpourri—one day you can have absolutely cloudless skies with unrestricted visibility, the very next day, one-quarter mile in fog.

The detachment began with briefs from range personnel and from base operations on field and local area operations. The first target was scheduled for a midday launch, and we had three planes overhead for qualifications.

The second day started out with terrible weather. Information India called for a 200-foot overcast, one-quarter mile in fog, and calm winds. The weatherguessers were projecting mid-morning clearing.

The launches were delayed, but we were able to sneak the first go airborne only one hour late. We were the fourth event of the day, call sign Bird 4 (naturally). We got our IFR clearance into Canada and ATIS, and after all aircraft systems were checked, I called for taxi from Apron Alfa in front of Hangar 8.

Bird 4: Whidbey Ground, Bird 4 for taxi with India and clearance.

Ground: Bird 4, via Taxiway Charlie, taxi to runway 25. The altimeter 30.22. Last RVR runway 25 was 5,200 feet.

I rogered the taxi clearance. (A 5,200-foot RVR?—better look that one up again.) It had been at least eight years since I had flown into Whidbey Island, and I had my approach plate directly in front of me resting on the glareshield opened to the airport diagram.

We taxied, with the taxi light on (more for others to see us rather than for us to see them) from the apron onto

Taxiway Echo depicted on the diagram. We passed a taxiway that was clearly marked by a taxiway guidance sign with the letter "T" (for Taxiway Tango). I asked my pilot to slow down for a second so I could find Tango on the airport diagram.

I distinctly remember discussing with my crew how appropriate an Approach article would be regarding our situation: a transient S-3B gets lost at the airport in a heavy pea-soup fog, unwittingly and without clearance crosses the duty runway, and is hit by a landing or departing A-6/EA-6 from our air wing. (Bad juju for us and maximum paperwork for sure. You don't know how much; as XO, I hate paperwork).

Unable to find Tango on the airport diagram, I called the ground controller to verify our clearance:

Bird 4: Ground, Bird 4. Did you say Tango or Charlie Taxiway?

Ground: Charlie Taxiway.

Bird 4: Roger, copy.

I knew something was wrong. Clearly, the black background guidance sign with a huge yellow "T" and arrow was pointing in the direction where Taxiway Charlie should be. So this was Taxiway Tango and Ground had cleared us for Charlie. Maybe it was a little further ahead on the parallel taxiway. We'd press on to Charlie. At least that is how I interpreted the situation in the heavy fog. Should we have stopped and called it a day? Nah-h! We can hack it; I knew we were right. But not all signs were pointing in the right direction.

Ground: Bird 4, there is a vehicle up ahead about 1,000 feet, says he has you in sight and will be exiting the taxiway.

Bird 4: Roger, copy.

I couldn't see the vehicle. No way, even if it had an orange beacon light turned on and it was flashing or rotating. It makes sense to believe that the vehicle reported to the ground controller that we had missed the turnoff to Taxiway Charlie.

Ground: Bird 4, Ground, hold your position.

Bird 4: Bird 4, hold my position now.

Ground: Looks like you missed Taxiway Charlie. Are you familiar with the location you are in right now?

I was clueless as to exactly where we were on the airport diagram, but I knew approximately where I was—at least I thought I did.

Bird 4: Looking at the airport diagram, we are on Echo.

Ground: Roger, you are on Echo. Is there grass on both sides of the taxiway?

Bird 4: That's affirm. Looks like we just passed Tango. Tango is not depicted on your airport diagram.

Ground: I tell you what, do you see an E-2 ahead and to your left on the inboard ramp?

Visibility was definitely as advertised, and I could only make out the outline of a C-9 parked on the ramp directly aft of my port wing. It turned out that the E-2C was parked on the transient line next to the tower, but we couldn't see the E-2, tower, or any buildings from our position.

Bird 4: Looking. Negative, I have a C-9 directly at nine o'clock.

Ground: OK.

There was a long pause from the ground controller. I guess he was trying to figure out where this damn transient S-3B was located on his airport.

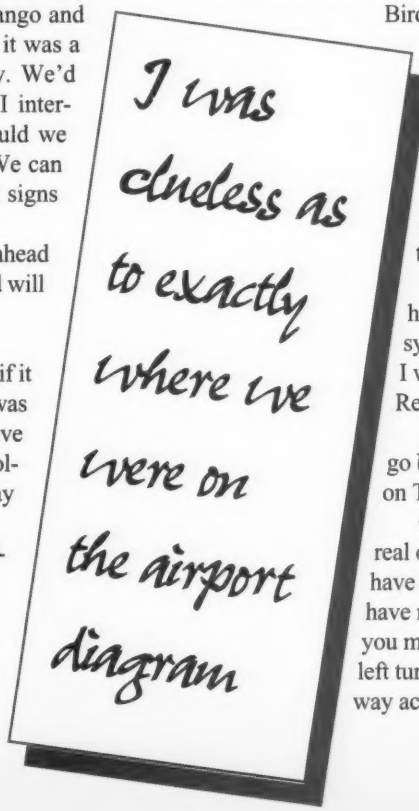
Bird 4: I have an E-2 at 11 o'clock.

Ground: Roger that. OK, what you can do is taxi up to the end of the grass on the left there. You will have more room to make a 180. Or I can have you hold there, and I will send a follow-me out there to send you toward the approach end.

Our controller was extremely helpful and (at least sounded) sympathetic. But there was no way I would tolerate following a truck. Real aviators lead.

Bird 4: Roger, we'll do a 180 and go back to Tango, and then outbound on Tango.

Ground: You must be looking at a real old diagram of the field 'cause I have been here for about a year, and I have never heard of Tango. But once you make that 180, it should be your first left turn, and that should take you all the way across to the approach end.



Bird 4: Roger.

Now I knew we really had something cooking here. I had current pubs. S-3B Mission Commanders (and especially Your Favorite Executive Officer) wouldn't be caught D-E-A-D without current pubs. What kind of a leadership thing would that be for the rest of my JOs?

Ground: I've got you in sight now. 180 at your discretion. OK, I see you starting your turn. Once you straighten out of that turn, it will be about 1,000 feet ahead of you on the left.

Bird 4: Roger, copy.

Bird 4: Ground bird 4, I'll take a left here on Tango.

Ground: Roger.

So, we finally got to the end of Taxiway Charlie, which I figured was marked incorrectly as Tango. As we arrived at the approach end of the duty runway and were ready for departure, the second S-3B event of the day was crossing the threshold of runway 25, breaking out at minimums. I didn't say a thing until they checked in with Tower on GCA rollout. Bird 2 quickly disappeared into the fog. Bird 2's crew was not aware of my earlier taxiway discussion with Ground. Check this out ...

Bird 2: Whidbey Tower, Bird 2, GCA rollout.

Tower: Bird 2, Whidbey Tower, you are not in sight, report clear of runway 25; it will be a left off the runway.

Bird 2: Bird 2.

Bird 4: Tower, Bird 4 holding short 25, IFR release.

Tower: Bird 4, Whidbey Tower, runway 25, taxi into position and hold.

Bird 4: Bird 4, position and hold, runway 25.

Tower: Bird 2, Tower, where are you at right now?

Bird 2: Bird 2 is clear of 25 at this time.

Tower: Bird 2, roger, you can contact Ground. Are you on the angle taxiway?

Bird 2: We'll go on the Charlie taxiway.

Tower: No, are you on the angle taxiway, sir?

Bird 2: We are on Tango.

Tower: There is no Tango taxiway. Hold your position and contact Ground.

After successfully completing our mission and dropping our two torpedoes (on top of target, of course), we debriefed in the ready room. Of special interest was our getting lost at the airport. I discussed our situation with base operations after speaking with crews of Bird 2 and Bird 3, who also were confused with airport markings.

Long story short, all taxiways were incorrectly marked with "T" (for taxiway) guidance signs. The correct letter designation should have been the letter designation of the taxiway vice "T". That is what I was looking for. Whidbey airfield facilities has submitted a work request to correct and replace all "T" guidance signs. But now the leading question—how long had those signs been in place? Twenty years? More? And is it true that aircrews over the years just blindly followed the signs 'cause that is how it always was done, never questioning authority, and just tolerating the status quo?

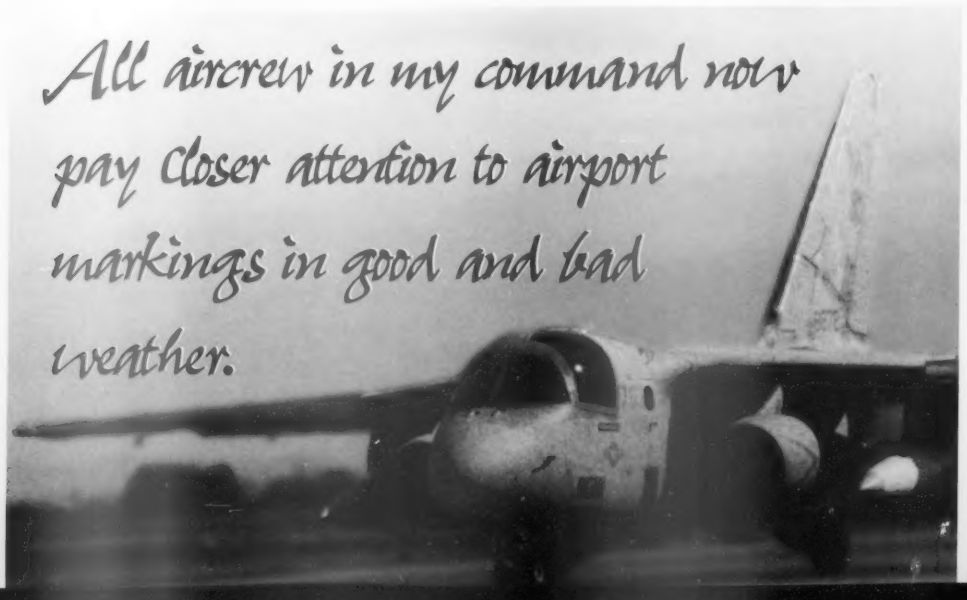
If you ever see something that doesn't make sense, challenge the system. Ask questions; work with those who should know and have authority. Help them to understand that just because something is normal for them, maybe, just maybe, an outsider who is not familiar with those operations has a better idea or sees something they can't see.

Even though markings are not discussed at instrument ground classes, all aircrew in my command now pay closer attention to airport markings in good and bad weather.

Cdr. Winkler is the CO of VS-33.

Special thanks to ACC(AW) Terry Gannon, NAS Whidbey Tower Chief for his assistance in collecting data for this article.

Cdr. Winkler reports that NAS Whidbey Island has updated the runway signs.—Ed.



Inverted, Blinded, and About to Fall Out!

By Lt. Jeffrey Marshall

It was a gorgeous Pensacola fall day when I began my journey. An excellent day for my first flight in the Navy as a student NFO. My Marine instructor evaluated my horrible aircraft pre-flight and my abysmal, disjointed communications. He demonstrated ground procedures and how to get around the airfield and into the air. Once airborne, the lesson continued working with controllers, aerobatics and in the landing pattern.

Like any good student, I went through the preaerobatics checklist with my instructor and discussed what to expect during each overhead.

Our first maneuver, following the clearing turn, was a wingover, which was fun. After another clearing turn, we began an aileron roll. Then the fun really started.

We hit 180 knots, 15 degrees nose-up, and began the roll. Inverted, I suddenly realized that I hadn't finished the preaerobatic checklist. At this point in the maneuver, my pocket checklist came out of my right calf pocket. I had placed it there thinking that it would stay secured. I had forgotten one minor point—to zip the pocket shut. That minor point suddenly became very important as the PCL fell out and hit the canopy handle.

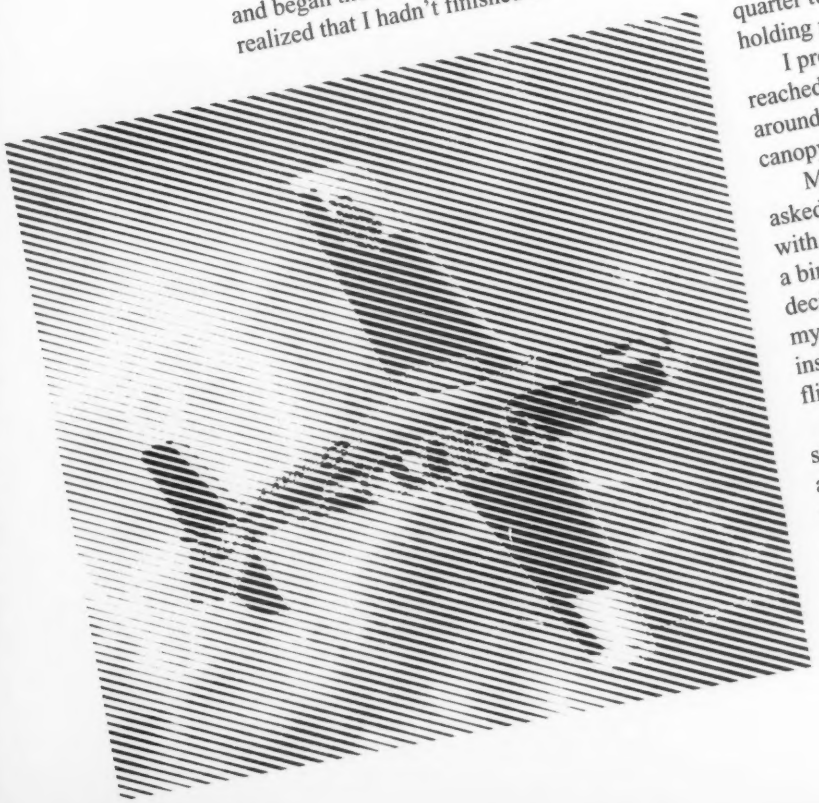
The canopy promptly slid full aft and my little world in the backseat became very loud and very busy as everything on my kneeboard, all my charts, notes, and gouge were sucked out of the aircraft. To add insult to injury, the right lens in my glasses immediately shattered in the 180-knot wind blast and flew out. There I was: inverted, half-blind and hanging half out of the aircraft because my harness was loose. I instantly remembered from my NATOPS that the harness had a single-point release for "easy exit from the aircraft." I remember looking down at the ground and thinking, "Only a quarter turn on the single-point release is holding me in this aircraft!"

I promptly pushed myself off the canopy, reached around still inverted, and fumbled around until I found the handle to slide the canopy forward and closed.

My instructor righted the airplane and asked what had happened. He had thought, with the noise and the wind, that we had had a bird strike or a midair. After I told him, he decided that we should RTB. I squinted out my good left lens to read the boards and instruments as we landed, ending my first flight in the U.S. Navy.

As for the problem PCL, incredibly it stayed in the plane; I recovered it from the aft-most position in the cockpit where the wind had evidently blown it. I now thoroughly review all checklists and doublecheck all my zippers when I run through the stall-aerobatic checklist. ◀

Lt. Marshall flies with VS-33.



Bravo Zulu

BZs require an endorsement from the nominating squadron's CO *and* the appropriate CAG, wing commander, or MAG commander. In the case of helo dets, the CO of the ship will suffice. A 5-by-7-inch photo of the crew by a squadron aircraft should also accompany the BZ nomination. Please include a squadron telephone number so that we can call with questions.

(left to right) Capt. Lee and 1st Lt. Gering

Capt. Samuel D. Lee, USMC
1stLt. Bradford J. Gering, USMC
VMA-311

Capt. Lee and 1stLt. Gering launched from MCAS Yuma for an air-to-ground mission using live ordnance—Mk-77 napalm canisters and AGM-65 Maverick missiles. As 1stLt. Gering prepared to launch a Maverick, he found that his Harrier's throttle was stuck at 92.4 percent rpm. He couldn't move the frozen throttle.

After calling the SDO, Capt. Lee and 1stLt. Gering flew to the target area to jettison the napalm. They retained the Mavericks to enhance high-power handling characteristics during approach and landing. The two Harrier pilots jettisoned their napalm and headed back to Yuma.

Following SOP during inflight emergencies, an LSO arrived on station, as Capt. Lee thoroughly reviewed NATOPS —including securing the engine on touchdown— with 1stLt. Gering during the flight home.

Anticipating a loss of electrical power when he secured his engine, 1stLt. Gering started the auxiliary power unit during the approach. He landed using a straight-in, variable-nozzle approach and secured the engine on touchdown with the emergency fuel-shutoff handle. After rollout, the AV-8B was towed back to the line.

Maintenance found a loose engine-monitoring system lever, which had jammed the throttle quadrant. An EI is in progress to determine the reason for the failure.

(left to right) Capt. Frank Simonds and Capt. Michael Finley.

Capt. Frank Simonds, USMC
Capt. Michael Finley, USMC
HMM-162

Midway through a Med cruise, Capt. Simonds and Capt. Finley were preparing to make low-light NVG landings onboard USS *Guadalcanal* off the coast of Bosnia. The weather at launch time was 1,000-foot ceilings, and seven miles visibility. There was no moon. After both pilots finished their takeoff checks, Capt. Simonds pulled the AH-1W into a hover over spot 5. Capt. Finley again checked cockpit gauges and reported no problems.

Capt. Simonds began his takeoff by increasing power and sliding left. The aircraft immediately had a stability and control augmentation system (SCAS) hardover, which rolled the aircraft hard left, and pitched the nose down toward the water 50 feet below.

With the aircraft in an uncommanded dive, Capt. Simonds simultaneously applied full left pedal to bring the nose 90 degrees into the relative wind, used up collective to reduce the descent rate, and secured the SCAS. Capt. Finley provided altitude and heading calls.

Capt. Simonds recovered 10 feet above the water. He then transitioned to forward flight and made an SCAS-off landing.

"Seats Safe!"

By Lt. Karl Kleiderer

Peter Mersky

Since the first simulator in VT-10, the powers that be have vehemently pounded a phrase into our heads. "If you use the checklists, you can't get hurt." In most cases, they are absolutely correct, but they should add a second half to that phrase that says, "...and if you get distracted during the checklist, start over from the beginning."

I was almost complete with the "systems" phase of the A-6 FRS syllabus. If I could finish this phase before starting CQ, I would be way ahead of the game. The requirement was for both a day and night Search Radar Terrain Clearance (SRTC) flight on a difficult route through the Cascade Mountains. The butterflies in my stomach served more then ample notice that I was feeling a little nervous about flying with the Ops O. He was a nice guy, but he was still the Ops O.

The brief went fine and I even got his random NATOPS questions right. Soon enough we were taxiing to the duty.

"Wings, trim, flaps, fuel, controls, seats, harness, pop-ups..." And then, terror. I dropped my chart! I was guilty of the ultimate cone-head buffoonery, and with the Ops O, no less.

"Uh, I dropped my chart, sir." He promptly told me not to call him "sir" and to pick up my chart. Of course, we had already armed the seats, so I safed mine and wiggled my hand toward the manila folder that contained the secrets to my route. I couldn't reach it.

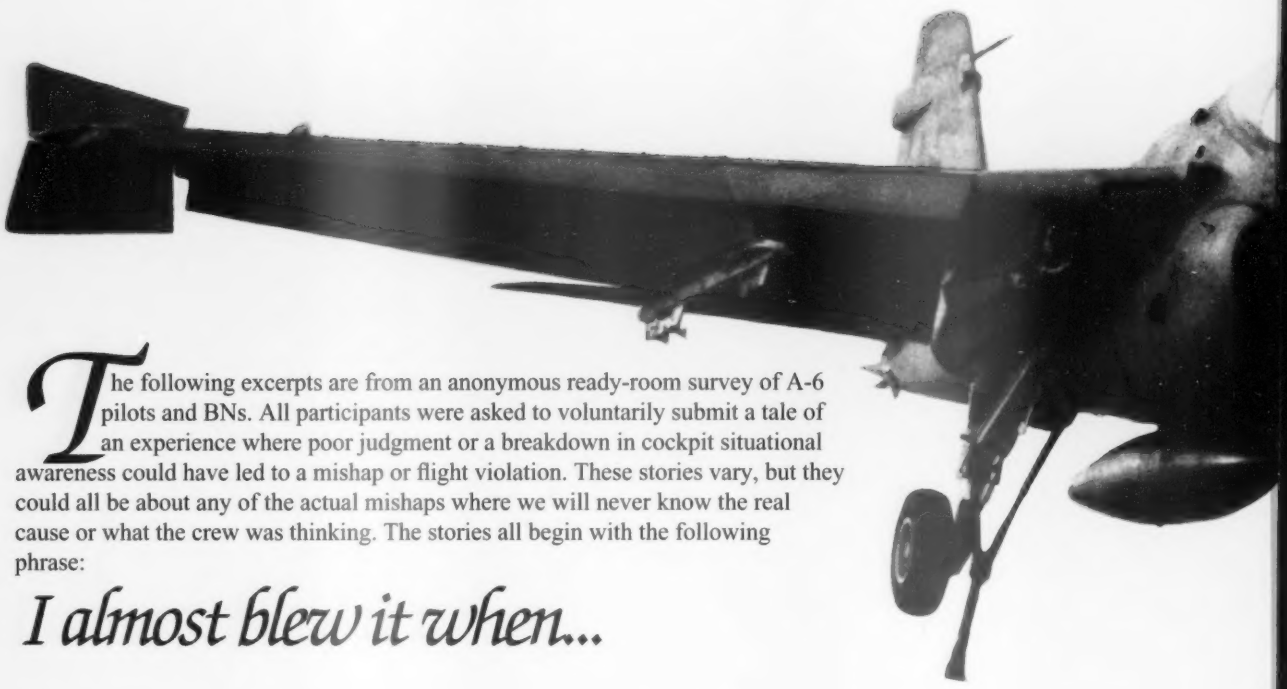
"Uh, I'm gonna have to unstrap." The hop was going downhill rapidly, but there was time for improvement. I finally got my chart and strapped back in. As my heart rate returned to normal, I tried to regain some semblance of composure.

The hop went fairly smoothly once we finally got airborne. The moon was out, casting a friendly glow over the rolling Northwest Territory. We dropped our blue bombs and started for home. On landing roll-out from our ACLS approach, my pilot called for "Seats safe." And then absolute bone-shattering terror set in; my seat was still safed!

After retrieving my wayward chart, I had forgotten to re-arm my seat. We interrupted ourselves after the "seats" item on the takeoff checklist and never went back. I had just flown for more than an hour at 700 feet AGL in the mountains, at night, with a safed seat.

I know I'm not the first to do this and certainly won't be the last. It will never happen to me again, but it could happen to you. I could have avoided this situation if I had started the checklist over from the beginning. ➤

Lt. Kleiderer flies with VA-52.



The following excerpts are from an anonymous ready-room survey of A-6 pilots and BNs. All participants were asked to voluntarily submit a tale of an experience where poor judgment or a breakdown in cockpit situational awareness could have led to a mishap or flight violation. These stories vary, but they could all be about any of the actual mishaps where we will never know the real cause or what the crew was thinking. The stories all begin with the following phrase:

I almost blew it when...

I was in the night dive pattern at the target. I was trying to qualify for the monthly bombing competition, and all I needed was a night dive. It was the last day of the month, and the weather was 3,500-4,000 foot overcast at the target. I wanted a 20-degree final dive angle and pressed into the target at the bottom of the clouds. I rolled in and started tracking.

As I came off target, I saw the radar altimeter below 200 feet, heard the LAWS tone blaring and my BN yelling, "Whoa!" Freeze data indicated the bomb came off with the aircraft 12-degrees nose-down and at 540 feet. The bomb was long and so was I, almost.

After launching from Cat 4, I raised the flap lever instead of the gear handle.

I was low state at the boat (bolter-ex). I rendezvoused on the hawk tanker, and after several shots, I got in. I took 2,500 pounds, but ended up with only 2,500 pounds in the main bag. I had forgotten to turn the correct switches on, so 1,500 pounds of unusable fuel was in the drops and wings. I had a big pucker factor on the ball.

I tried to stay VFR across a hilltop during a day low level under marginal VFR conditions. Seconds after we went IFR, the radar altimeter went off at 200 feet.

During a functional check flight test of the generators, I inadvertently turned off both engine-fuel master switches momentarily instead of the nearby generator switches. I was at 350 feet, in a 30-degree bank, gear down, in the landing pattern. Wow!

During a night cross-country, my aircraft lost the combined hydraulic system. We continued another 300 miles to our destination, passing up numerous suitable military diverts.

My BN had to tell me that I wasn't strapped in as we took the duty runway.

I did a flyby of my parents' business and almost pulled up into a civilian twin. Definitely not worth losing my wings over.

I was flying a boring SSC mission and decided to start a loop at 500 feet. Three-quarters of the way through the loop, at 90 degrees nose-down, we were a little scared as we looked at the 2,500-foot cloud deck. We bottomed out at 800 feet. I'll never do that again.

During a low level with the radar altimeter set at 200 feet, I got distracted in the cockpit. I recovered at 100 feet in a 10-degree nose-down attitude.

Tales from the Dark Side

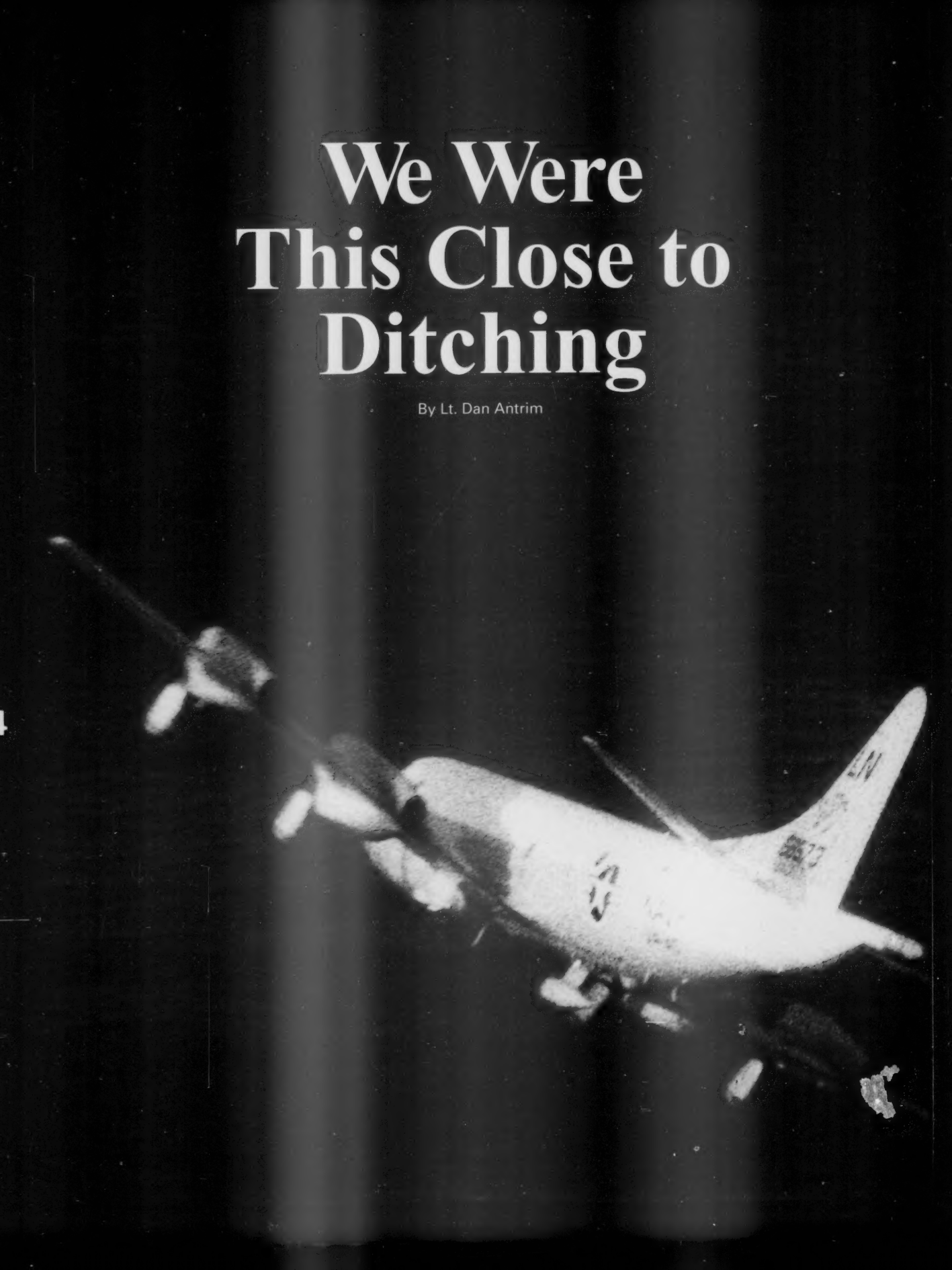
After being out of the FRS for only one week, I was on a night SAR hop with no terrain clearance capability. I was crewed with a senior O-4 pilot who would not heed my advice to turn and climb as my radar went very black approaching a large ridge. The radalt went off at 700 feet just before he wrapped the aircraft up into a 4-G 90-degree turn.

I was flying at night to an IR route at FL 290 with the auto-pilot engaged. We had five miles to work off to make our route time. I pulled the throttles back, intending to slow to 16 units. Our radar failed, and while troubleshooting for three minutes, the aircraft stalled. I executed appropriate procedures and lost 800 feet. The caution in NATOPS about stalling the aircraft with altitude hold on is legitimate. ◀

—Submitted by VA-128

We Were This Close to Ditching

By Lt. Dan Antrim



We were on a night ASW training flight at 300 feet AGL, with the No. 1 engine loitered. Conducting MAD runs, we turned to reseed a buoy field. The third pilot, who was in control of the aircraft, turned to me very calmly and said, "Hey, I think we're gustlocked."

I immediately took the controls. The elevator and rudder were nearly immovable, the aileron appeared normal, and we were in a slow descent. We went through the autopilot-emergency disconnect procedures as we added power and tried to climb. Initially, we decided not to disengage hydraulic booster packages for the flight controls because we thought that might make things worse. At this time, I was actually trying to remember if an immediate ditch was one long ring or four short ones. With the 3P and me pulling back on the control wheel, the aircraft finally responded and started to climb.

Climbing through 500 feet AGL, and still fighting the controls, we tried restarting the No. 1 engine while the crew secured loose articles and strapped in. Things now went from bad to worse. We got an indication of a possible prop-fluid leak for which NATOPS dictates securing the engine. At this point, the 2P jumped into the seat to replace the 3P, and we took stock of our situation. We had three good engines, and the elevator was very stiff but moveable. The ailerons seemed normal, but the rudder was barely moveable. We had a full 25 degrees of right rudder trim in, but we were still standing on the right rudder pedal to maintain balanced flight. This seemed excessive, even with normal rated power on engines 2, 3, and 4. At this point, we discussed whether we should attempt to restart the No. 1 engine despite the malfunction. We decided to keep the engine secured in case the prop oversped.

As we leveled off at 7,500 feet, with about 60 miles to home plate, we began to plan our approach. Realizing that this problem would affect us throughout the approach, landing, reversal and especially in a waveoff situation, we practiced two approaches at altitude, one with approach flaps and the other with landing flaps.

During the landing-flap waveoff, even with full right rudder applied, we could not maintain a balanced, straight flight path. We decided to use the approach flaps for landing. A very challenging three-engine approach and landing followed. Once on the deck, we brought engines 2, 3, and 4 back into reverse, and the aircraft drifted to the right of centerline. The rudder authority proved to be less than effective at maintaining centerline, and we needed asymmetric power to control and stop the aircraft.

Postflight inspection by maintenance found both the up-control cable for the elevator and right rudder control cable were misrouted. The elevator cable was chafing on part of the pulley housing, burying itself in a groove in the metal, which caused the binding. The rudder cable was chafing against a steel pin, causing extensive damage to a 10-inch section of the cable, wearing through approximately one-quarter of the cable strands. Investigation determined that the last time maintenance had been done on these cables was during depot-level maintenance six months earlier.

We never thought we would have compound emergencies, at night at 300 feet—but we did. I never really thought I'd have to ditch an airplane and crew for real, but I was within 200 feet of involuntarily committing to one. ◄

Lt. Antrim flies with VP-9.

St. Elmo Was

By Ltjg. G

It was a cool, drizzling, February night in central California as we manned up for our first division hop in what seemed like ages. After a slow start, we had finally started getting more Lot 15 Hornets to replace our weary, Lot 8 aircraft.

Our mission tonight was an IR route with pre-briefed radar targets that we were going to use to warm up our air-to-ground radar work with some simulated radar bombing. We had briefed flying in an offset battle-box formation with Dash 3 and Dash 4 flying in a three-mile trail from the lead element. We would fly most of the route between 7,000 and 11,000 feet MSL.

The weather forecaster warned of probable scattered-to-broken clouds in our altitude block. He also said that thunderstorms would not be a factor, although we could expect precipitation and, therefore, potential icing situations.

The launch and route entry went OK, and, as everybody slid into position to form the battle box, I started to experiment with some of the functions of the new OFP 91V.

The route was clear of clouds initially with good visibility. However, it did not take long to encounter some thin, scattered clouds. I tightened my position on Dash 1, and increased the frequency of my scan pattern.

"No problem," I thought, "this is workable." I returned to my HI, as I scratched my head and wondered how to get my sequence lines up on this new "SA page."

As I satisfied my curiosity by experimenting with push tiles, the cockpit filled with a sudden flash.

"Man, that shoot light can be bright at night!" I thought. "Must have driven the radar into an auto-acquisition mode, and it had locked up someone in range."

I reached up to reselect A/G mode, but it already was in A/G mode! Now why had I had a shoot light in A/G mode? And since when do you even get a shoot strobe when the cockpit is configured for night lighting? I finally concluded that the new tape had some software glitches.

"Better add it to the list with the other gripes when I get back," I thought.

Looking outside, I saw the clouds thickening a bit, so I slid up even closer to my lead. Shortly thereafter, Dash 3 called, "Lost sight, tied on" as briefed. A quick glance at my HI verified the briefed separation between flight elements of three miles as shown by the air-to-air TACAN. Then the lead called, "Waypoint 3, bombs away, coming right to 040."

I was mainly concerned with my position keeping off of lead as he rolled into a moderate right bank when...flash! There was that bright light again. Only this time, my peripheral vision told me that it wasn't a shoot light. It came from the windscreen or nose of the aircraft as far as I could tell.

Still hanging on to my lead, I started glancing out the front more often, trying to figure out what was going on. Was it lightning? Somehow that didn't seem right. Then I noticed a formation of static buildup on the upper

My Wingman

huster

left portion of my windscreen (i.e., St. Elmo's Fire) that moved and flowed as if it were liquid. I'd seen St. Elmo's Fire before, but I'd never seen it do what it did next. The glowing stream of electrons collapsed together into a concentrated ball on the midsection of the windscreen, and after about a second, the small circle of St. Elmo's Fire disbanded in yet another bright flash. There went my night vision for a few seconds!

Although I maintained my position on my lead's wing, I considered taking a cut away as my night vision diminished for a while. After a few more seconds, I noticed the cycle building again. This time, I averted my eyes toward my lead when the electrons started to concentrate just before dissipating.

Flash!

"This must be related to the newfangled coated canopies on the Lot 15s," I thought. "Was anybody else in my flight seeing this phenomenon?"

I pondered the possibility of my aircraft having some sort of grounding problem. I noticed that the St. Elmo's Fire started to dim and dissipate as suddenly as it appeared, and the flashing never recurred. The rest of the hop went without incident, although you can bet your bottom dollar that I had my plane captain give my canopy the required wiping down with his grounded glove before getting out.

It turned out in the debrief that Dash 3 had also seen the same flash. Neither Dash 1 nor Dash 4 saw St. Elmo's Fire or the flashing dissipation. Dash 3 agreed that the intensity of the flash could be detrimental to night vision, possibly creating a hazardous situation. Also, though none of us were wearing night vision goggles at the time, we wondered what effect the flash might have had on them if a pilot were looking through the windscreen.

Within the next month, we had three more occurrences of this phenomenon, one during the day. All occurred in IMC, or in and out of scattered clouds. Whether this problem is exclusive to Lot 15 Hornets, exclusive to only those Hornets with the coated canopies (Lot 12s and after), or could happen to any Hornet (or aircraft, for that matter) in the right situations remains to be seen.

Although our squadron has experienced this problem for a couple of months now, there has certainly been an increase of messages lately regarding this issue, so it would be folly to think we've seen or heard the last of this problem. The pilots in our squadron, who had been briefed after our first experience with this, knew to avert their eyes and not stare at the bright glow before it flashed. ◀

Ltjg. Schuster flies with VFA-137.

Gloves have been procured and are available through squadron IMRL managers. Manuals for maintenance, aircraft handling, crash-and-rescue, and NATOPS have all been updated. This hazard was recommmended closed and tracked under SAR 12-008. Windshield and birdstrike damage, as a new canopy design may be an option. Check the latest issue of the "Safety Action Record" for action status.—LCdr. Lloyd Prince, F/A-18 analyst, Naval Safety Center.

Zero PSI and Nowhere to Land

By Lt. Nancy Stewart

Lt. Nancy Stewart

It was a perfect day for a helicopter second pilot to practice ship landings: 70 degrees Fahrenheit, sunny, unrestricted visibility, moderate winds, and calm seas. My aircraft commander, who was also the detachment OIC, and I walked to our H-46, which was already spotted on the deck. We were scheduled for a 1330 takeoff. A second aircraft was to launch at 1400.

We launched on time. Once clear of the ship, we reported, "Ops normal." I was at the controls and established the helicopter in a left orbit around the ship at 200 feet AGL and 70 knots. We waited for the second aircraft to lift so both crews could begin DLQs.

The second Sea Knight (BR 45) was rolled out of the hangar after tower had received our "ops normal" report. This was standard procedure for us while embarked on a single-spot ship. Crossing the stern, I noticed that BR 45 was on deck, chocked and chained, blades still folded. In another 15 or 20 minutes, we could begin our DLQs.

Continuing our orbit, the HAC and I experimented with our secure-voice system, which was new to both of us. It didn't seem to be working. We were having difficulty transmitting to Tower and Control, although we were able to hear them. The crewmen offered suggestions, but the HAC decided to secure the system.

As the HAC secured the system and returned our radio to normal transmission, I rolled into a left turn to cross the bow. As I did this, I noticed the master-caution light flicker. I keyed the mike to tell the crew, but before I had a chance to say anything, the transmission-oil pressure light illuminated.

"We have a pressure light," I announced. I had never experienced an actual emergency in the H-46, so in the back of my mind, I was still trying to determine just how the crewmen had gotten that light to illuminate.

No sooner had the words left my mouth then the HAC announced that he had the controls. Then I realized this was real. As the HAC took controls, he switched the radio to tower frequency, declared an emergency, and demanded that the flight deck be cleared for an immediate landing. As he did this, I switched the radio to another frequency, since we had so much difficulty communicating with Tower earlier. We could also hear flight ops at the carrier, further adding to the confusion.

I glanced at the transmission pressure gauge and called out that the forward-transmission pressure was 20 psi, the minimum allowed. The crew chief announced there was a severe transmission oil leak from the No. 2 engine bay and recommended we land as soon as possible. By now, the oil pressure had fallen to 0 psi.

As we came up the port side of the ship and crossed the stern, we noticed that BR 45 was still on the deck. By the time we turned down the starboard side of the ship, we could see the deck crew scrambling to move the aircraft into the hangar.

I guess we were all fixating on the flight deck. I snapped out of it when I heard the altitude system warning. I glanced at the radar altimeter and called, "Altitude!" as I watched the aircraft descend through 75 feet.

The HAC, still trying to communicate with Tower to expedite the aircraft move, increased collective and climbed. Ditching had not been discussed, so we were keeping the aircraft in a landing profile, trying to avoid power changes.

Nearing the bow, I began reciting procedures for imminent transmission failure. I glanced back into the cabin and saw transmission oil pouring from the engine bay. Both crewmen were strapped in. Seeing that, I realized the severity of our situation, and I actually considered removing my kneeboard to facilitate egress if we ditched.

Not wanting to accept that possibility, I left it on and grabbed my NATOPS pocket checklist to review the procedures I had just recited. I flipped through it in vain, trying to find that emergency procedure before returning it to the glareshield.

As we came down the port side, the ship's control asked what assistance we would require once on deck. The HAC told Control to stand by and called again for a clear deck. We all waited eagerly for the flight deck to come into view, hoping to see it clear and BR 45 in the hangar. We were fixating again, and this time the HAC caught himself slowing through 50 knots and accelerated. BR 45 was being rolled in, but wasn't off the deck yet.

Barely across the wake, the HAC made a left turn, inbound for landing. We perched off the starboard quarter momentarily until BR 45 was rolled outside the foul line.

On short final, we quickly reviewed landing checks and discussed the need for an immediate shutdown on deck. Control again asked what fire and medical assistance we required. The HAC and I simultaneously yelled, "Stand by!"

Crossing the deck edge, one of the crewmen unstrapped and grabbed the portable fire extinguisher. BR 45 was still only half in the hangar, and the HAC made a no-hover landing. We shut down immediately while Tower called winds and amber deck.

The entire emergency lasted only three minutes. Not everyone may agree with how we handled the emergency, but the fact is we saved an aircraft and, more importantly, we saved four lives.

As I write this, a full week later, I am able to think more clearly about the entire incident. A number of things about the flight bother me.

First, when I made the initial call about the caution light, I didn't specify transmission oil. Although we don't have any other oil-pressure caution lights, one of the crewmen did tell me that his first thought following my call was an engine oil problem. This miscommunication did not cause any problems, but it easily could have. Be precise with your terminology in the aircraft, especially in an emergency.

Pay close attention to the notes, cautions and warnings in NATOPS. Although we had three good indications of imminent transmission failure (a caution light, zero indicated oil pressure, and a major leak), I felt comfortable continuing flight. Or maybe I should say that I didn't feel comfortable with the idea of ditching the aircraft. I convinced myself that I didn't have to think about or discuss ditching until we had a rise in temperature or a transmission oil hot light. A NATOPS caution explicitly states that if you have a severe leak of transmission oil, you may lose oil pressure without noticing a rise in temperature. With all the indications, maybe we should have landed sooner; in other words, maybe we should have ditched. But we did land safely. ◄

By the time we turned down the starboard side of the ship, we could see the deck crew scrambling...

Lt. Stewart flies with HC-8.

Flying the Limit

By ACCM Dave Faudie

The number of pilots flying too fast into the break seems to be increasing lately. We recently received a letter from an FRS student who broke the sound barrier coming into the break. Probably graded as above average for aggressiveness, unsat for headwork.

He created more than a couple of noise complaints. He also busted a series of regulations. FAR 91.117 says, "Unless otherwise authorized or required by ATC, no person may operate an aircraft at or below 2,500 feet above the surface within 4 nautical miles of the primary airport of a Class C or Class D airspace area at an indicated airspeed of more than 200 knots (230 mph)."

Also, OPNAVINST 3710.7P, paragraph 5.1.4. says, "To reduce midair collision hazards associated with high aircraft speeds at low altitudes, FAR, Part 91.117, imposes a maximum airspeed limitation of 250 knots..."

These are not arbitrary speeds designed to keep pilots from fully enjoying the capabilities of their aircraft. The FAA has determined these are the maximum safe speeds a pilot can reasonably see and avoid another aircraft.

Like a state policeman's radar, ATC radar lets us know how fast a jet is flying. An approach-control facility recently mailed me the radar depiction of an F-5 returning home at a very high ground speed. The F-5 pilot, who was returning IFR from another NAS, penetrated for a vector to the overhead, and kept his speed at 450 knots until he was handed off to Tower. Then he accelerated to 530 knots ground speed for the break!

Fortunately, the F-5 did not run into the exhaust of a fellow aviator. What if Tower had told the F-5 to extend upwind, and there had been a Cessna at the same altitude just outside the airport traffic area (Class D airspace)? Would the pilot have been able to avoid the Cessna, or would we have seen the controller's worst nightmare—aluminum showers? ◄

ACCM Faudie is the air traffic control analyst for the Naval Safety Center.

PH3 Todd Lamonica

Letters

Re: "There I Wasn't! (Dec '93)

USS *Thach* (FFG 43)—While the article doesn't refer to a specific ship, the accompanying photo does plainly show the hull number. I suggest that you publish a correction to eliminate any misunderstanding in your readers' minds that *Thach* had anything to do with the story.

Incidentally, this incident was described in great detail at the P-CO (FFG 7 Specialty) course at the Surface Warfare Officers School. It was given as an example of the dangers, and complex command-and-control issues associated with a successful 76mm gunshoot.

Cdr. W.F. Barns
Commanding Officer

While we sympathize with any member's concern that his squadron or ship is construed to have been involved in a negative way with one of our articles, we hasten to remind our readers that unless we indicate otherwise in a caption, the photos that accompany each story are strictly for illustration and in no way imply any guilt or association with the incident described.

Publishing 15-20 articles each issue really drains our photo resources. Occasionally, we have to settle for a shot that might not specifically show what we want but at least is in the ballpark. We do consider the photos, however, and don't drop in whatever view comes up next in the file.

We've said it before, and continue to say it on our little reply postcards and whenever we talk to people on the phone, "Send us photos!" If you're not sure what we need, just check out any issue of Approach. *As long as there is no safety violation in the photo, any shot is a candidate for publication.*

A few suggestions? People briefing, preflighting, strapping in. Pilots, NFOs, ground crewmen, ashore, on the flight deck, fixed-wing, helo, VF, VA, VFA, VMFA, HS, HSL, VR, VMGR, VT, HT—in other words, the gamut!

If you're shooting for a cover—which we also require—consider the vertical format, and a colorful, dramatic subject. If you have questions, call us.

We're fortunate here at the magazine that our readership continually sends us articles. We'd like to light a fire under some of those same folks to send us photos—prints, slides—with the same regularity.

—Ed.

Approach welcomes letters from its readers. All letters should be signed, though names will be withheld on request. Address: *Approach* Editor, Naval Safety Center, 375 A Street, Norfolk, VA 23511-4399. Views expressed are those of the writers and do not imply endorsement by the Naval Safety Center.

Vultures' Row

This list includes Flight, Flight-Related and Ground Class A Mishaps during FY-94.
Classifications and descriptions are subject to change.

DATE	AIRCRAFT	COMMAND	DAY; NIGHT	FATAL	FLIGHT REGIME; LOCATION
7 Oct	UH-1N	HMM-163	N	1	Takeoff; at sea
14 Oct	UH-1N	HMM-268	N	0	Towing, aircraft fell overboard (AGM); at sea
15 Oct	AV-8B	VMA-231	D	0	Birdstrike during low-level; Raleigh, NC
29 Oct	F/A-18D	VFA-106	D	0	Aborted takeoff; Whiting Field, FL
18 Nov	F-14A	VF-84	D	0	Training flight; Currituck Sound, NC
17 Dec	F/A-18A (2)	VMFA-115	D	1	Air-to-air intercept; off Okinawa
10 Jan	HH-46D	HC-6	N	3	Amphibious SAR support; at sea
12 Feb	F-14B, F/A-18C	VF-103, VFA-81	D	0	Midair (not same flight); Adriatic Sea
17 Feb	T-2C (2)	VT-23	D	0	Midair during formation training flight; Kingsville, TX
18 Feb	HH-46D	HC-6	N	0	Controlled ditching; at sea
22 Feb	F-14D	VF-11	D	0	Crashed; at sea
8 Mar	EA-6B	VMAQ-3	D	0	During FCLPs, possible bird ingestion; Cherry Point, NC
12 Mar	CH-53D	HMH-363	D	1	Hit trees/ground after takeoff; Bridgeport, CA
5 Apr	A-6E	VA-304	D	2	Hit water following break for FCLP pattern; Alameda, CA
28 Apr	F/A-18C	VFA-83	D	1	Crashed at sea following catapult launch; Adriatic Sea
25 May	AV-8B	VMA-542	D	0	Crashed in water following in-flight engine surge; Dare County, NC
21 Jun	F/A-18C	VFA-82	N	0	Crashed following engine fire; Pinecastle target, FL
21 Jun	AV-8B	VMA-223	D	0	Engine problem, crashed on final; Cherry Point, NC
29 Jun	EA-6B	VAQ-141	D	0	Hit ground during landing, gear collapsed; Fallon, NV
11 Jul	MH-53E/C-172	HM-14	D	1	Midair; Chesapeake Bay, VA
14 Jul	F-14A	VF-51	N	0	Ramp strike; at sea

Welcome to the Afterlife

To assist our placement personnel, please complete the following questionnaire. Your cooperation is appreciated.

1. I was killed during:
- ☐ Unauthorized aircraft maneuvering
- ☐ Lost sight of other squadron aircraft
- ☐ Impromptu (but awesome) air show
- ☐ Drunk driving
- ☐ Died of natural causes in my sleep as a great-grandfather (Go to executive class check-in)

2. I am convinced that:
- ☐ NATOPS is wrong! **Really!**
- ☐ It was the other guy's fault
- ☐ It was an aircraft engineering design flaw from waaay back
- ☐ The airframe should have withstood more stress
- ☐ It was the two gin-and-tonics on top of that six pack that did me in

3. My death will be remembered as:
- ☐ Spectacular!
- ☐ The guy who **almost** made it
- ☐ The reason for NATOPS Change Number 6, "WARNING…"
- ☐ We all knew it would happen to a guy with all his problems
- ☐ Another senseless highway statistic on ACTIONCAM NEWS

Thank you for your help! This information will be used to determine which remedial program might be right for you. Please WAIT for your number to be called. Be patient. You may have been in a rush to get here, but that's no cause for a crisis on our staff's part.

By LCdr Brian Lewis